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Senate panel drops NSC Contra role inquiry

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Two leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday said they haven't been told everything about the National Security Council's involvement in aiding groups seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, but they won't pursue the matter further.

Sen. David F. Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the panel, said he was convinced after meeting with National Security Advisor Robert C. McFarlane at the White House that he was "telling the truth as he sees it."

"Are we satisfied this concludes the matter, that no one was involved in directing this matter? No, we can't be satisfied," Mr. Durenberger said.

Mr. Durenberger and Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., the ranking Democrat on the committee, said they were uncertain if all the facts are known about the role of Lt. Col. Oliver North, who is on the NSC staff, though they plan no further action on the issue.

A main accomplishment of the meeting, according to Mr. Leahy, was that they and the White House now "all understand what the ground rules are" on assisting private groups.

The House and Senate intelligence committees are responsible for oversight of the CIA and other government agencies involved in intelligence gathering and covert actions. The allegations against Mr. North were that he violated a law prohibiting any "direct or indirect aid" to the rebels.

Mr. Durenberger said his panel will begin a review of what guidelines should be applied in the future since Congress has approved \$27 million in non-lethal assistance for the rebels and the restrictions in the Boland Amendment will expire Sept. 30.

Mr. Durenberger said he expects to hear soon from CIA Director Wil-

liam Casey on what the CIA plans to do in Nicaragua after expiration of the Boland Amendment, which applies to U.S. intelligence agencies.

The United States should not supply direct tactical assistance or intelligence to the rebels, Mr. Durenberger said, but should provide aid only to the unified political arms of the rebel factions.

The House intelligence panel plans to review the allegations about Mr. North while the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere plans a hearing.

Yesterday's meeting with the Senate Intelligence Committee leaders was requested by Mr. McFarlane, according to the committee, but also came after the lobbying group Common Cause asked the panel to investigate press accounts that Mr. North had helped private groups in the United States raise funds for the rebels, and also provided them with military advice.

An intelligence committee press release quoted Mr. McFarlane as saying that, "No NSC staff member either personally assisted the resistance or solicited outside assistance on their behalf. At no time did anyone act as a go-between or focal point for such aid."

The next paragraph said, "Nevertheless, the senators [Durenberger and Leahy] stated that they continue to have concern about the potential for the NSC to fill the gap when Congress had prohibited a different branch of government from a specific activity."

The press accounts of Mr. North's activities involving private groups raising funds for the rebels, known as "Contras" or counterrevolutionaries, alleged that his activities may have violated the Boland Amendment, which bans "direct or

indirect" U.S. support.

The amendment, added to the fiscal 1985 authorization bill for the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies, did not take effect until Oct. 1, 1984, and officially expires Sept. 30.

"You can certainly do your best to keep [up] the morale of our friends — the Nicaraguan opposition — until we can change the position of the Congress," Mr. Durenberger said in explaining the administration's position.

He added that Col. North "did not deny responding to phone calls [from people who] would call and say, 'I'd like to . . . help these guys out, and he would say, in effect, 'You know who they are, but we can't tell you what to do.'"

This summer Congress continued a ban on lethal military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels but approved \$27 million in non-lethal aid and agreed to permit the CIA to share intelligence information with the rebels.

Prior to the latest appropriation, the United States provided more than \$80 million to the rebels who are operating out of bases in Honduras and Costa Rica.